Leaflet No. 61

June 1944
(Reprint)

Preparing Poultry On the Farm For Marketing

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Distributed by
AGRICULTURAL EXTENSION SERVICE
Department of Agriculture
Edmonton, Alberta

Issued by the direction of
HON. D. B. MacMILLAN
Minister of Agriculture

EDMONTON:
Printed by A. Shnitka, King's Printer
1944

Preparing Poultry On The Farm For Marketing

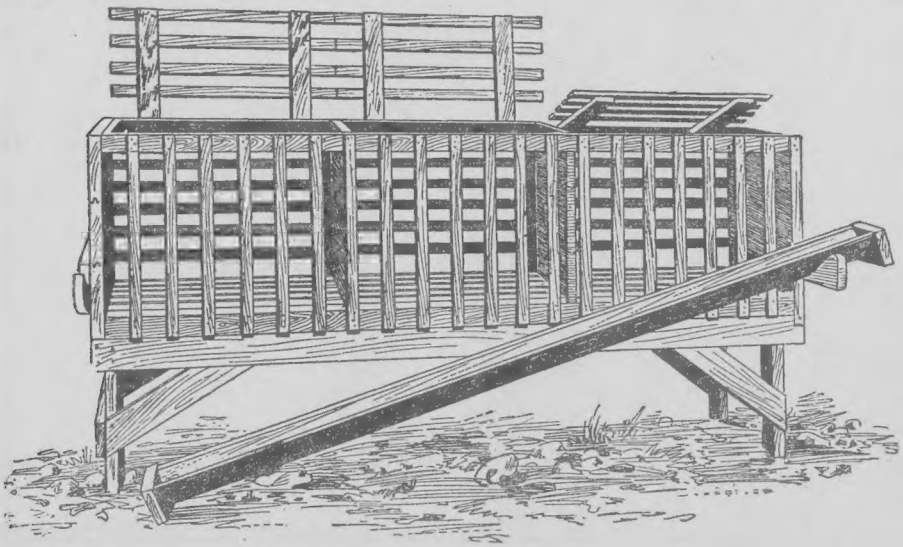
The economic importance of converting home-grown grains into a finished product on the farm is being more seriously considered than at any time in the past. The finishing of market poultry on the farm right at the source of feed, follows out this idea and at the same time can be made to yield the greatest proportionate return from any labour on the farm.

The consumers of poultry meat show a decided preference for a well finished product. With the introduction of regulations making it compulsory for all dressed poultry to be bought and sold according to Canadian Grade Standards it is more important than ever that farmers should market only birds in the top grades. The added return for better grades can be had by proper feeding during the fattening period and careful handling while killing and dressing.

There are two methods of finishing. Crate feeding and pen feeding. In crate fattening, the feeding period is usually two weeks, rarely exceeding three weeks, because the inactivity imposed by confinement makes it difficult to maintain the appetite of the birds, and once they go off their feed they will lose weight rapidly. In pen feeding the feeding period may be four weeks or more before sufficient fat has been laid on to get top grade. The appetite and general thiftiness of the birds is the best guide as to when the fattening period should end. Should any birds not respond to forced feeding or refuse to eat they should be removed from the crate or pen and be killed and dressed for home use, or liberated to be finished at a later time.

Following either method, a mash mixture moistened with skim-milk or buttermilk gives satisfactory results.

The use of Alberta grown grains as a fattening mash has proved satisfactory. The mixture advised by the Alberta Poultry Branch is as follows: Ground wheat, 25%; Ground whole oats, 40%; Ground barley, 30%; and Meat Scrap, 5%. All grains should be medium finely ground and the coarser hulls should be sifted out. This is mixed with skim-milk or buttermilk to the consistency of thin porridge. For best results, mix the fattening mash with soured milk one day before feeding.



Fattening crates are usually made in sections six feet long, 16 inches wide, and 20 inches deep, this being divided into three compartments each holding four birds (see Illustration on page 2). There is a slat bottom which allows the droppings to go through. The crate should be placed in a sheltered location. free from drafts. Almost any shed or part of a barn will do if there is sufficient light for the birds to see to feed. Birds should not be unduly disturbed, as the object is to keep them quiet and contented.

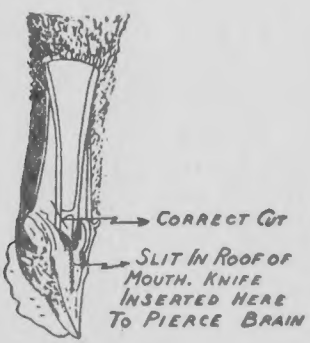
The fattening pen can be any part of a shed or unused part of a barn that can be partitioned off for the purpose.

The birds selected for fattening should be strong, vigorous, and well fleshed. Avoid thin, sickly birds and those having large coarse frames with little meat. The heavy or dual purpose breeds usually will be found to give the best results, although birds of the lighter breeds such as Leghorns will finish satisfactorily if not unduly disturbed during the feeding period.

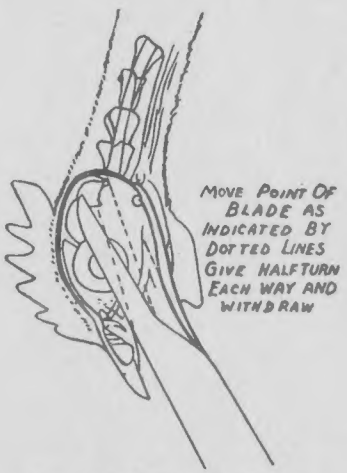
Hens that are to be marketed and are well fleshed, can be materially improved by a fattening period from 10 to 14 days.

Before the birds are placed in the crates they should be free from lice, and the crates, or pens properly disinfected before each fattening period.

It is most important that the crops of all birds should be empty at the start of the fattening period. It is a good practice to starve birds for 24 hours and flush with salts before the fattening mash is given. A common mistake is to over-feed at the start. This should be avoided by giving only one feed and a worm tablet the first day after the fasting period, the second day, two light feeds, then on to full feed the third day. The usual practice is to give the birds all they will clean up in half an hour, two or three times daily, being sure to remove any feed left in the trough after each feeding. This feed can be put in the mixture for the next feeding. Grit should be given twice each week. Do not feed any whole grain. Birds should have water available between feeding periods.



HEAD OF BIRD WITH LOWER JAW AND PORTION OF SKIN OF NECK REMOVED



KNIFE IN POSITION IN BRAIN OF BIRD

It is just as important to properly kill and dress market poultry as it is to have the desired finish. Carelessness or indifference to proper bleeding, plucking, or cooling may cause the loss of one grade or more, which may easily offset any gain that may have been made during the fattening period.

Birds to be dressed should be starved for at least 24 hours before killing, and allowed plenty of fresh water during this period. The best method for bleeding is through the mouth, by cutting the jugular vein, as shown in the above illustration which should be studied closely. After the cut is made

and the blood is flowing freely the brain should be pierced. This is done by placing the knife blade in the groove in the roof of the mouth, as shown in the illustration.

The piercing of the brain causes a reflex action in the muscles of the skin cells holding the feathers and when properly done the feathers can be removed quickly and easily. Use a good killing knife and keep it sharp. Proficiency is gained through practice.

BIRDS ON THE FARM SHOULD BE DRY PLUCKED. As very few farms have the equipment for efficient scalding of poultry, a large percentage of the dressed chicken and fowl arriving on the market from the farms lose one or two grades because of poor scalding. Wax plucking, which has been given some publicity and is being used in some large commercial plants, cannot be used to advantage on the average farm. All feathers should be removed. Do not leave any feathers close to the head or on the wing tips, as these have to be removed at the assembly points if left on at the farm. Blood should be removed from the mouth and the head wrapped. The vent should be freed from excrement by pressing the abdomen inwards and towards the vent from a point about three or four inches from the tail. Feet should be cleaned.

As soon as dressing is completed the birds should be cooled as quickly as possible. This is done by hanging them in a cool place in such a manner as to allow the air to circulate around them. Do not allow to freeze, as frozen birds are put in the lower grades.

It is important that the birds be handled properly after killing and dressing, as the bloom secured by good feeding and efficient killing and dressing can easily be lost through carelessness.

The length of time required to fatten turkeys will depend on the method of rearing. Where the flock is raised in semi-confinement and the birds have only an acre or two to range on they will usually be in good market condition when mature, if a well balanced ration is constantly before them. Turkeys that have been allowed free range, and birds that lack finish, will require four to six weeks pen feeding. Turkeys should be killed, DRY PLUCKED, and handled in the same manner as chicken and fowl.

Capons should be well fattened and at least ten pounds live weight before being dressed if maximum returns are to be received.

Ducks and geese usually are in good condition for dressing when mature and SHOULD NEVER BE SCALDED. Scalding of ducks and geese or tearing of the skin allows the oil to escape and become rancid unless the birds are frozen, and grades are lost through both blemish and freezing.

Important: DRY PLUCK DUCKS AND GEESE.

Dressed poultry should be carefully packed on the farm in boxes lined with clean brown paper, with paper between each layer of birds. There should not be more than three layers of chicken and fowl or two layers of turkeys to each box.

Chicken and fowl should be finished on the farm at regular intervals, usually once each month when the flock is culled, and not left until the Christmas season when they must compete with turkeys, and when assembly points are working every minute of the day. The fact that in some areas farmers are marketing their chicken and fowl late and alive has made it necessary for the assembly plants to refuse to accept live chicken and fowl during the month of December.

The producer is the only person who can economically finish poultry. If killing and rail grading are done at your local Registered Grading Station, that is the place to have your poultry killed and dressed. Otherwise, you should kill and dress them yourself according to the instructions in this leaflet.